

Opening Statement of
Deputy Ranking Republican John Curtis
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on National Parks,
Forests, and Public Lands
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 139,
H.R. 486, H.R. 3250, H.R. 3824, & H.R. 4139
10.29.19

As Chair Haaland noted in her opening remarks, the Subcommittee meets today to consider five pieces of legislation, each of which relates to the National Park System. Two would authorize special resource studies, two propose the addition of new units to the system, and the final bill would add additional acreage to an existing unit.

As we consider requiring the National Park Service to complete more special resource

studies and add additional acreage to manage, I hope we will keep in mind the budgetary constraints currently facing the Park Service and the significant backlog in deferred maintenance.

The current \$12 billion deferred maintenance backlog is four times the annual budget of the agency. I hope we will be cautious as we consider new additions to the National Park System and I hope that House Leadership will allow for Ranking Republican Bishop's Restore Our Parks and Public Lands Act to come to the House Floor for a vote. I have been a strong advocate for this bill and believe it will help ensure our parks can be enjoyed by future generations.

With that said, I would like to briefly share my thoughts on the bills before us today. First, we will discuss H.R. 139 offered by Mr. Rodney

Davis of Illinois. This bill would establish the Springfield Race Riot National Historic Monument in the State of Illinois as a unit of the national park system. The site to be designated by this bill commemorates the Springfield Race Riots of 1908, a tragic event in our nation's Civil Rights history which spurred social reformers to come together in 1909 to form the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Earlier this year, the Park Service completed a survey of the site and concluded that it was likely that the site would meet the criteria for inclusion in the National Park System if fully analyzed through a Congressionally authorized special resource study.

Next, we will hear testimony on H.R. 486 offered by Mr. Vargas of California. This bill requires the Secretary of the Interior to conduct

a special resource study of Chicano Park and its murals located in San Diego, California.

Chicano Park is a 7.4 acre park known for its display of nearly fifty vibrant murals depicting the history of Chicano culture. I think we should consider the content of these murals when analyzing various proposed designations over this area.

Next, we will hear testimony on H.R. 3250 offered by Mr. Danny Davis of Illinois. This bill would require the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study of the sites associated with the life and legacy of Julius Rosenwald, with special focus on the Rosenwald Schools.

Over the course of his life, Julius Rosenwald donated millions of dollars to public schools, colleges and universities, museums, Jewish

charities, and African-American institutions. Of all his philanthropic efforts, Rosenwald was most famous for the more than 5,000 “Rosenwald schools” he established throughout the South for poor, rural African-American youth, and the 4,000 libraries he added to existing schools. I believe this is important African-American history to preserve and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on this legislation.

Next, H.R. 3824 is sponsored by Mr. Bost of Illinois. This bill would establish the Cahokia Mounds Mississippian Culture National Historical Park in Illinois as a unit of the National Park System. Cahokia Mounds is the largest pre-Columbian settlement north of Mexico. In 2016, the National Park Service concluded a survey of Cahokia Mounds, which recommended that a full special resource study

be authorized by Congress to more completely evaluate the criteria for inclusion in the National Park System.

The final bill before us today is H.R. 4139, offered by Mr. Vela of Texas. This bill would authorize the transfer of roughly 166 acres from the International Boundary and Water Commission to the National Park Service to become part of the Palo Alto Battlefield. The addition includes the historic Fort Brown, a crucial location during the Mexican-American War.

Thank you to all the witnesses for their presence here today, and we look forward to your testimony.